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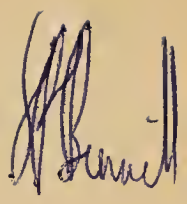

June 25
1930

DOCTOR DONNE & GARGANTUA

SACHEVERELL SITWELL

DOCTOR DONNE & GARGANTUA

THE FIRST SIX CANTOS

LONDON
DUCKWORTH
3 HENRIETTA STREET
1930

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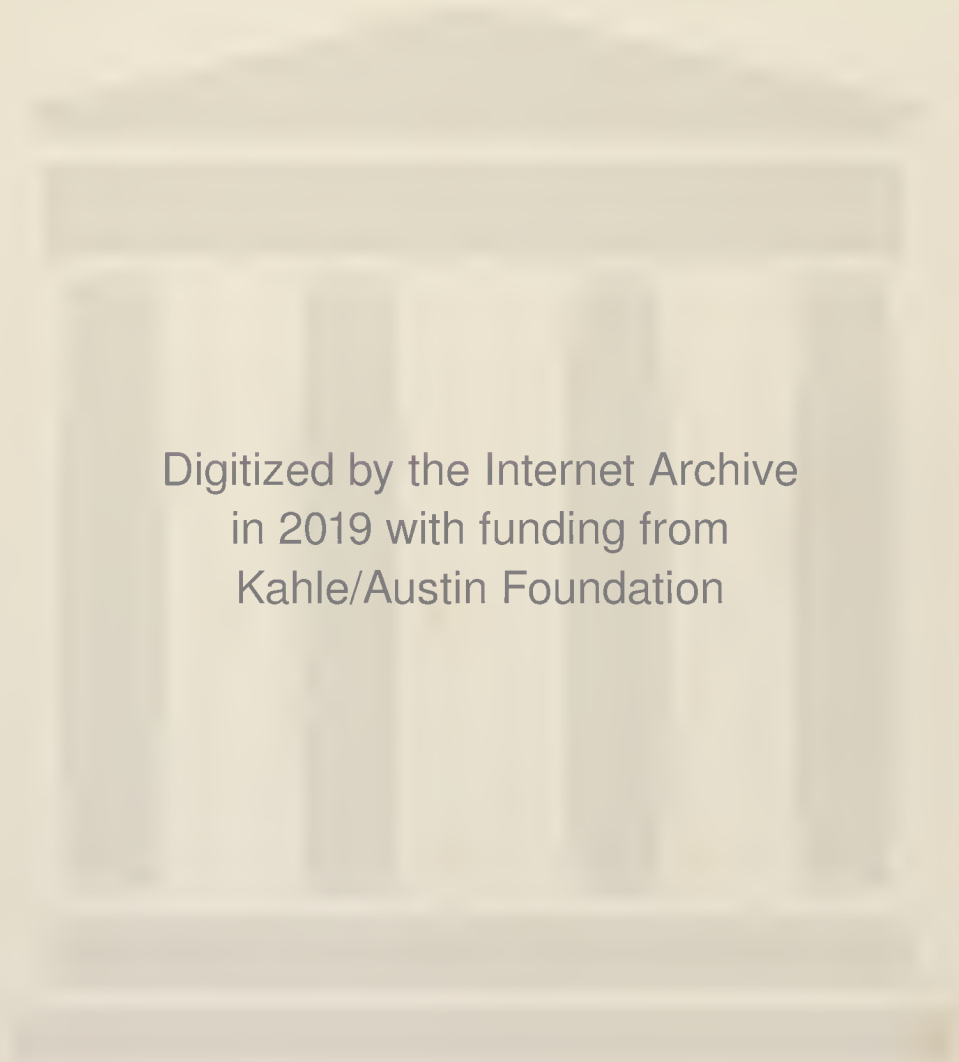

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PREFACE

The first three Cantos of *Doctor Donne and Gargantua* have been previously published, but the whole of the second half of this volume is now printed for the first time.

This poem, as now presented, has been worked on at intervals over the last ten years. The first portion of it was published in 1921, and the whole project was undertaken deliberately as a material likely to occupy congenial moments over a long stretch of years. Certain brusqueries of style have been purposely and conscientiously left as they stand, for they act as a foreshortening and curb the sentimentality which it is not easy to avoid in a long poem. There is not space here to enter into certain technical problems connected with the extension and bridging of imagery, but the notes at the end of the book have been written to give clues where there seemed to be any particular difficulty. The whole poem is a contest between good and evil, between the spiritual and the physical, and that having been said there should be little else to understand that is not supplied by the notes.

Weston
26 January 1930

DR DONNE AND GARGANTUA

CANTO THE FIRST[1]

Go and catch a falling star,
Get with child a mandrake root.
JOHN DONNE

Shall arrow-root and Benger's food
Furnish us fancies for our mood?
The mandrake, and the witches' sabbath
May yield more fruitful aftermath.
Gargantua and Doctor Donne
Swallowed their pills like other folk,
They laid a wager, neither won,
Yet neither underwent the yoke.
Gargantua said he would contrive
To get a mandrake root with child;
Doctor Donne had said he'd strive
To snare a meteor, wet and wild.
And so they set out from the Alps
Which showed more white than old men's scalps;
They shivered to their knees in snow,
And waited for the sign to blow.
Their view embraced all seas and lands,
The devil tempted them to leap,
If they relied on wings, not hands,
No longer should they stray like sheep;
They should go forth as eagles, keen
To blind the sunlight with swift sheen;
Like lions they should walk abroad
Till silence trembled when they roared.

Spurning this offer with just pride,
They opened maps and looked intent,
The way they chose was hot and dried,
Without the ease that promise lent.

A bugle broke the stillness;
Ineffectual, and almost muted;
Quickly shaking hands, they started
Making down the mountain side;
First they walked together, later,
When they came upon a river,
Doctor Donne crossed over quicker,
Leaving on the other bank
Poor Gargantua the fatter,
Slower walker of the pair.
Say good-bye to Doctor Donne,
I choose Gargantua protagonist
And lift my hero to the pedestal;
I shall wheel him on his car,
Like a tiger he shall pass among the frightened trees,
The arms of waves shall hold him and shall move him,
He will be a sea-god dying on the waters;
I shall halt, and in the public square
He will be a totem to the kneeling crowd,
A fœtus in a belly, a god upon an altar,
A mirror for perfection of the unborn race.
I shall shout something as follows:

"I am not come with elephants,
Nor can I cure you of disease;
But here is Gargantua, the giant,
The trumpet at God's lips
To blow my orders to the winds who run for me;

Not only this, but a mirror
Flatter than sea, less misty than the sky,
For the sun to hang over.
I like to think of him watching my friend,
To catch the weakness that he wears himself,
And mend his movements from Gargantua's style.
Soon, too soon, the other stars will burn
And forge sharp swords to kill the sun.
Pray to him until he falls in his armour,
And all the time know that my friend is important;
When the hot light is dead, then will your hour have come,
Send him ambassador, ask for his help,
He will find out a means, and will direct your feet,
Life will come back again, darkness will die.
    Gargantua is here to-day
    To get a mandrake root with child,
    Over the hills not far away
    I want you to think of Doctor Donne
    Walking the world to net a falling star;
A fair wager, and I hope you'll help him.
To get a mandrake root with child
Would solve the problem of your flesh;
If Gargantua succeeds
The sexual problem may be somehow settled;
To-day I won't say more than this,
You must think for yourselves of the fresh delights.
But a word of warning;
Remember, please, that my friend, Gargantua,
Sings beneath a window when he can't find the stairs,
My advice is lock your doors
And send your daughters to their beds,
Gargantua is quick to seize them;
I will speak of Donne when he comes this way."

So I made Gargantua get up his speed,
He came quite quickly down to the plains,
But I lost him in crossing a little wood,
Thinking too deeply of the words I'd say
In introduction to his keen campaign.
It seems Gargantua stole away,
Hid behind the trunks of trees,
Crawled along the hollows;
I blew my bugle in vain
Down the valleys,
Getting more breathless till I touched a road,
Where I stopped for a moment,
Looking and breathing;
I pretended to be coughing
When some peasants passed.
As soon as they turned a bend
Off I had gone again;
Now that I thought it safe,
I bugled once more,
I blew like anything into the town
With the shrill welcome of my own fanfare.
But they were all asleep,
Barred with shut windows,
And I drowned in the darkness,
Was lost in obscurity,
Fell down, fatigued, on the pavement and slept.
Fatal weakness, to let slip
The firm control I exercise,
For should I sleep, then should Gargantua;
He only speaks when I'm away,
And only acts when I'm asleep.
I woke, and thought of Doctor Donne,
Then of Gargantua with a shock,

Realising it was still dark
And something had woken me from my dreams.

Gargantua left me in the wood,
He hid behind the trunks of trees,
Crawled along the hollows
And lay behind the hedges while he heard my blasts—
Then, as the darkness fell,
Into the town he walked, mocking me.
I suppose he mistook my obscurity,
Never suspecting what there was to hide;
So he dropped his slow, wobbling gait,
Walked briskly, swinging his arms,
Straight through the town,
And, in the middle, he stopped to shout.
There was, immediately, a certain confusion,
People came pouring from the dancing halls;
And a mob surged round him,
Trying to listen.
Then he remembered to be mystical,
And all of them grovelled on their knees together;
But he carried things too far,
And spoke to them only as I can do.
It was just at this juncture that I stood up, stretched,
And made my way to the noise I heard;
I was half minded what to do with him,
And, as I arrived, he had broached his mission.
The mandrake was too much for them,
I don't know why they thought it worse
Than offering marriage to their daughters.
Trouble began,
The first stone flew across the air
And struck me:

Then I half regretted being there.
We all started off in an instant:
I saw Gargantua far along a street,
Open a door, and run inside the house:
Unluckily for all concerned,
My hero made himself at home,
Professed affection for the daughter,
Locking her, and himself, upstairs.
Well, he must look after himself;
And I left him, jumped the wall, swam the ditch,
Ran, right deep into a wood, and slept.

Next morning—how absurd it seems that I should share
their little day,—
I started off, at sunrise, for the West;
But not before I'd climbed a tree
And listened for Gargantua's voice
To crack the stillness and the earthen bowl.
In vain.

Doctor Donne we parted from across the stream,
And now we chase his feet along the bank.
For a time he saw Gargantua across the river
As he wobbled in and out among the trees and bridges.
I've lost the reins, we three are separate,
It often happens in such hilly country.
You can shift for yourselves, I confess myself,
I would sooner than not be out of your way.
I've made no speeches, told no fortunes,
But, as far as I can, I'll watch your feats.

Donne walked on till daylight fled
And thoughts of sleep came into his head,
While he watched the starry sky,

Till a sudden spark lit up his memory.
Walking the world to net a falling star—
And yet the gold he sought now found him sleeping.
He heard far voices, feared no danger,
And knew they were not plotting for his elixir.
The fruit they look for, hangs from trees
And drops, to lift an echo from the hollow mines
Whose gold they wash in water, and subdue with fire
Before they let it smile upon the sun.
"But mine," thought Donne, "shines out from the nets,
Grows plumper, shielded from the worrying winds
That float like birds to peck my fruit;
And all the wires, the yielding scales,
The nets that give for growing, are of better gold.
If I could catch an apple as it falls away,
I should not need to dig and find my treasure."
This is Donne; you've heard Gargantua
Preach his mission from my pulpit,
And I have sketched the speeches I've intended.
If Donne is precious, then Gargantua is prudish.
I left Gargantua locked in with the daughter,
And now we spy on Donne who counts the glittering stars.
He numbered more than the biggest lapful,
Forgot his counting, and drifted into sleep:
Not far away Gargantua slumbers,
Fondling the girl he kidnapped, who enjoyed his violence.
All of them asleep, and so was I.

How did Gargantua escape disaster?
Waking in the morning, much refreshed and young,
Gargantua's stratagems took shape again.
"You are my daughter, and my wife, in one;
I shall tell the people of my God-like find.

The child of your parents with an added grace,
My holy paternity is also yours;
If their conception, it was my idea.
You shall be my priestess; they shall pray to you.
And all the while beneath this cloak,
I can come back again, a ball of lightning,
And sleep away the pleasure of our holy meeting."
Then he unlocked the door, and spoke outside.
Of course, in a moment they were at his mercy,
Grovelling and praying all along the street.
The father and the mother were the first to greet him,
And when he claimed their daughter, they at once agreed.
"I shall leave your daughter, till I call for her."
And then he smiled on her, and shook hands with them both.

What can I do to pay Gargantua,
Make him suffer for his boldness?
He ran downstairs, unbarred the door,
Bowed to the window, waved farewell.
"Remember the mandrake; what I told you,
Problems it may help to settle.
I propose we leave your daughters,
Let your sons crusade with me."
At his words the young men started,
Met outside the city walls;
Bugles rang, sharp wind through leaves,
The golden stars were gathered in the fields,
They lay among the lawns and blessed the stillness,
Their mothers and their sisters bore the helmets, felt the plumes,
It touched me, and I nearly choked,
Felt I could cry to see them all;
Any hint they act upon.
But Gargantua led them out,

They worshipped him, forgetting me.
A blast of a bugle, and they rose,
Took their helmets, shook the plumes,
Stood up in their glittering armour.

In front of them Gargantua rode,
The apex of this arrow-head,
The sharp beak of this hovering eagle
That lingered over the far-flung plain.
A river of stars to leap the rocks
And net the hills with their wingless foam;
In front of them Gargantua rode
Tempting a meteor with his lance
To drop on them and join its heat,
Sift it through the burning grain,
To lie there for the waves to break
And cool that mane of yellow sand.
A lance that challenged topmost stars
Stood, the pinnacle, of this temple—
Gargantua was helping Donne—
But why he started on crusade
Except to help his own adventure,
None of us knew, except Gargantua.
Mine was now a queer position:
Doctor Donne was out of sight,
And Gargantua usurping
The privilege I take from men.
Out of sight; but Donne could see
The meteor dancing in cold space
Above Gargantua's boastful head.
He saw it and he started off
And ran back to bask beneath its light.

Dimly through leaves and down the shadowy valleys running,
Climbing to clear hilltops for a sight of dripping fire,
Not throwing like the tongue of fountains
Softening the ice-bound air
But falling out of space and time,
Donne could see his meteor, drop,
Plunge, try to pull back with ribbed wings,
But fall faster,
Drop its control of speed,
Run through the winds, but not waver from their force,
Or stagger from their flow of rivers,
Blow forth the clouds as chaff
From his fire breath of speed;
Then Donne looked for Gargantua's fusion,
Looked, listened, and waited long,
And when his breath had come, went on again.

CANTO THE SECOND[2]

The swans, whose pens more white than ivory,
Eclipsing fair Endymion's silver love,
Floating like snow
Down by the banks of Po,
Ne'er tuned their notes, like Leda once forlorn,
With more despairing sorts of madrigals,
Than I,
Whom wanton Love hath, with his gad,
Pricked to the court of deep and restless thoughts.

A MADRIGAL
BY
ROBERTO GREENE

Such are the clouds—
They float with white coolness and snowy shade,
Sometimes preening their flightless feathers.
Float, proud swans, on the calm lake
And wave your clipped wings in the azure air,
Then arch your neck and look into the deep for pearls,
Now can you drink dew from tall trees and sloping fields of
Heaven,
Gather new coolness for to-morrow's heat
And sleep through the soft night with folded wing!
Ride still at anchor, high above Thelema,
While the gardener goes down the long ladders of rain,
Planting new flowers, to train
Darker shadows to grow round the windows
For serenades answered from darkness to darkness,
Set free with a whirr of wings,
From out their cage of strings.

Gargantua and Doctor Donne:
Where are they? Which of them has won?
I left Gargantua with his golden kite
That fell through the wind and lies a-sizzling in the water,
Remember the terms on which they met!
Donne's was the meteor wild and wet,
But Gargantua wins it though it's not his bet.
"Trees drop amber on the banks of Po";[3]
And here the walls run, guarding as they go,
The Abbey of Thelema, at whose shore
My heroes, wafted by the golden ore,
Leave the spangled waters and lie down to sleep
Below these boughs that never cease to weep.
After waste lands and the rocky hills,
Tired and sleeping,
The loud sound of bells awoke them,
Suddenly forming like clear shape of flowers
That were never fresher than this open sky,
Full of yawning nets, wide-open cages,
Snares and pens for the sun to herd his winds.
They staggered to their feet and left the trees and reached the road,
Coming to the convent gate like travellers who ask admittance;
They are taken to their rooms wherein they rest till cool of day.

In the summer evenings after their supper
The Knights and the Ladies walk in the gardens.
Behold my heroes in the midst of them, Gargantua speaking!

GARGANTUA'S *speech*

"Doctor Donne and Gargantua, the poet and the giant,
We two have come here working at a wager,
Or he is Alexander, and I'm Julius Cæsar:

I'll show you what I mean."
(Little did he know I trod the self-same lawn.)
"God whom you worship, and the other Gods of other men:—
Take yours, for instance:—plays a lonely game
Moving his pawns, in armies, on each other;
The Knights riding by loud light of stars over the field,
Themselves like sunlight flashing between shades,
As they go from dark to light over woods and plain:
The castles never are still but ride like clouds
Changing from friend to enemy on their march,
Like clouds they must be climbed to,
Waiting for your moment till they strike a rocky crag
When you board it from this ladder and can hold it for a while.
So the castles are ready for the Knights to take them
And they fight together knowing that one side must win;
But they never see the reflex that one side must lose—
So Donne might be one general, and I, another,
Pitched against each other, one to lose and one to win,
Each of us as quick as Alexander or as Cæsar;
Our minds full of triumph—
Arches like loud tubes of music
And the open doors of palaces with light like gold within,
All the glitter and the music for our homecoming,
While one of us lies dead and cold as armour—
But listen how we've altered it!
As soon as we discovered what was ordained for us
We decided to combine and make a fight against him,
Thwarting all his efforts by our firm alliance—
No longer generals but fighting by philosophy,
And now that we are beating him we go still further.
We've made a wager, and whoever wins
Divides the treasure so that both are richer;
I must get a mandrake root with child,

And Donne will snare a meteor wet and wild;
Now you see our attitude and know our meaning!
Think of it in this way.
Here am I falling from the cliff's edge sheer down,
Dropping to the water's flat rim
Where I strike and drown—
One thing can save me;
If only I can flutter out my clothes for wings,
Filling them with air so they will break my fall,
Then can I glide down and walk the waters like a god.
But, to make this sure,
I must not plunge down, struggling in the air's grasp,
Fall as if I could not stay up longer if I wished,
But leap down, heading like the sailor's lead,
Heavier, more deadly, than the metal of a star,
For the quicker my passage, the faster will my wings spread,
Till I reach to the fields of sea and float there
Flying through the wave-crests like a bird through leaves.
There you have our theory! When we find his object
We charge through his manœuvres till we reach the other side,
We help him at his hazards, but *we* take the prizes.
As to our wager;
Donne's to snare a meteor wet and wild,
And I'm to get a mandrake root with child:
Both of these are games that we are at with God.
The meteor, now, for instance. What would our gain be?
It would warn him of our power and make us independent.
The handful of metal that a meteor melts to,
When it falls upon the earth or plunges deep into the sea,
Will form our elixir and work our wonders.
Not only is the meteor a private gold mine;
It cures all illnesses, and more important far
The feathers that we fly with to another star

Are woven of those golden wires that shine,
Whose glitter Doctor Donne foresaw
When he chose a golden meteor, unworked and raw.
We shall alter all the sky; cascades and showers
Will fall through blue air to drench those crumbling towers
Whose ruined battlements the winds defend:
For we'll empty the arena and that will be their end.
No more clouds at all,
Save a few for shade,
Floating like snow
Down by the banks of Po,
But never shall their coolness hide and quench the sun.
Flowers and trees give better shadow,
And if I get a mandrake root with child
The sexual problem may be somehow settled,
But wait for this until I've finished telling you of Donne.
We want the sky to be an open window,
Not shut with clouds that make a misty glass,
So golden trees of fire[4]
Shall blow there glancing in the wind that cools our bodies,
While you see the fruit fall like a fiery arrow.[5]
These branches give a better shade than clouds,
And when we send down rain,
The sun, like a gardener, goes down the ladder
Training new flowers to make better shadows
For serenades answered from darkness to darkness.
Cascades, as music drifting through the leaves
Rings out louder when the winds run near,
So the waters falling in a golden rain
Fold back their million wings, then open them again.
If we order every star, the tides,
And own all the treasure, what have we to fear?
God cannot speak to us from off a cloud,

No longer is he manifest in thunder and the storm:
We can hit back at him and keep him far.
Space becomes a lawn for all the dancing stars,
The still ones singing with loud voices,
While we get our music from the winds,
As leaf or cave will give it us.
Over waste lands and the rocky hills has our road led,
And though we've sought them everywhere,
Once and once only have the prizes come our way,
And then it was Donne's meteor that I nearly netted.
You all of you will help us, may I say I'm sure,
Now that I have told you what we've come here for."

Interruption. Like an old, old man
I appeared on the scene. You should have seen them run—
Loud I blew my trumpet. Then a crowd collected,
Seeing me and hoping for performing bears.
Gargantua crept up again and knowing who I was
He jumped upon a table and began to shout me down.

GARGANTUA *again*

"Ladies and Gentlemen. It is easily explained.
At a town we passed through, where I stopped to make a speech,
The mandrake was too much for them,
(You'll wonder when you hear the facts,)
They threw stones and I had to fly,
I ran along the street and saw an open door—
I hid inside its shadow till the crowd ran by—
Then what else was I to do except to dart upstairs?
The first room I got into I locked the door,
Who else should I find there but the daughter of the house
Whom I quickly made a convert to your order of Thelema.
Next morning, when my stratagems took shape again,

I arranged it with her parents and I spoke outside,
They understood my mission and they sympathised:
Yet here comes her father regardless of his promise to me":
(And all the time he looked at me and never showed a sign of fear:)
"He comes in defiance of the word he gave me
And thinks he can upset your rules as well.
I appeal to you to show him this will never do!
Cast him out, gentlemen, let him be thrown forth,
Or since I'm not afraid of him, hustle him aside!"
—Then the crowd surrounded me and pushed me off,
So I slunk into a corner where I planned in secret.
Gargantua relented and had me pushed aside
Because he knew it was useless to use force against me,
But I am still his master because I'm free to act,
And he can never guess my new disguise;
I'll wait till dark comes and watch them from my corner.

Gargantua, now that they were safe once more,
Drew Donne aside that they might lay their plans.

GARGANTUA

"They are ready for your meteor with nets and snares
To pull it from the branches like a flaming bird,
Or if it falls in water they will haul it here
Before its fires can burn out at the water's brim."

DOCTOR DONNE

"We shall win it, then, this next time.
But how about the mandrake? Are they ready for it?"

GARGANTUA

"I shall wait until this evening. When it's dark and dim
I'll beg the ladies to show me the herb-garden."

DOCTOR DONNE

"By what stratagem will you search among the flowers?"

GARGANTUA

"I can stoop to pick up apples as they boom upon the ground,
Choosing out the ripest as a gift to give them,
And bribing them with fruit they'll turn to singing birds,
They'll hover while they cannot fly
And murmur since they cannot sing,
While their silence gives the seconds that my search demands.
As the first man who floated in the air's blue fields[6]
Exulted in his strength and never planned his fall,
Just so I'll find my mandrake and not know the rest:
Helen might lie here for Doctor Faust to kiss
And he not know it for not looking through the leaves
Where her naked body loads the flowers with snow,
Lying like his lodestar till he lifts her down."

Donne tried to answer, but the evening bells
Thundered out and everyone was on his knees;
They were parted in the scramble, only I could see them.
The orchard was their dining-room,
It roofed them with a flickering shade
That fainted and was alive again
Each time the wind ran down the sky—
I saw Gargantua threading through the trees,
While Donne still waited where their talk had been.
When I started them from off the Alps
Little did I know what lay before me!—
Before the first day's journey they were out of hand!
Now they're in this Abbey where they mock my name,
Gargantua usurping every right I claim from men,
And I am greeted with loud laughter,

For they know all my disguises; like a King[7]
I ride out to review them in their uniform,
One day a general, the next an admiral,
And now they even know me as an old, old man;
I've lost my powers since they ceased to fear me,
But still I can dissemble and can lead them wrong.
Last time I made Gargantua draw down the meteor,
And now when he searches for his mandrake root,
I'll interpose and alter things.

Supper was over, and the Knights and Ladies
Were hauled in their barges up the gliding river
Till they loosed the teams of horses at the starting-point
And down the barges floated on the steady tide.
Not only was there music from the laughing stream,
But they sang on board the barges and their rattling strings
Carried up the voices till they reached the wind,
To float there riding while the barges passed below—
Faster, ever faster this Armada sailed
And its lights reflected were like golden oars,
Not working in the water, but lying stiff in air,
Though the drops still fell from them to dim the lights.
Donne and Gargantua were aboard the fleet,
Donne ever looking at the stars above
Checking up his count of them lest one should fall;
He might as well be counting in the flowering fields,
For the gold heads grow as fast as he can move.
Gargantua, on another barge, preached his mission,
Telling them the mystery of the mandrake root.

The Flower Waltz

"I come among you, mortal as you are yourselves,
Not winged, or ready to escape upon a cloud,

But worn-out, tired and footsore from my journey:
And now I have to tell you what I've come here for!
Too often has the race of man been doomed
And brought to disaster by one man's mistakes—
I told you this morning of my pact with Donne,
How we've made alliance so we can't be beaten,
And sure of our victory, we are thinking of the future.
The way in which I'm certain that our safety lies
Is to order, as we will, the very substance of our race:
We'll take an antidote against our poison
And kill our human weakness by an alien strength;
By this means. The mandrake, most deadly of the race of plants,
If we could only join ourselves by bonds of friendship,
Cancelling its enmity, that we need never fear it more,
From poison will be turned to balm.
Born of this union the future race
Are half immortal, free from poison's bane,
By this much, stronger for their fight with God.
I will show you other aspects—
Beauty bred there from the race of flowers
Will increase in the women till they pass what's been before
And the mirror of the past has never shown their like—
Shake in the wind, leaves, you need not be afraid,
No longer need you hide your fruit with shade,
Here is finer beauty than rains or sun have made!
Shut not your petals through the gloomy night
As though to keep your colour for to-morrow's sight,
This beauty burns through dark and makes it light!
Their eyes like starlight blaze out deeper as you look,
Their mouths a sweeter fruit than any wind ever shook,
Their words like jets of singing from the highest bough,
When they walk they spring with birds' feet up from branch to
branch,

Soft are their feathers like the breeze you touch,
And all of you fine ladies are but fledglings for these plumes,
For as quick as I can find it will your beauty grow.
Now which of you will help me and will lend the key
So I may search the garden for my mandrake root?"

The barges now were near their journey's end,
Burning all the brighter as they came to shore
When each lamp glittered with a double flame,
Answering from water when it heard its name.
Now to the court of deep and restless thoughts
Gargantua's galleon is carrying him,
The sighing madrigals among the reeds
Reach him on the wind and only sharp his needs;
Vanished the swans, perhaps they sing from out the brakes
And their's is this music that his feeling shakes.
He lands, and the darting light runs down the waves,
Reaching over the waters like a last faint cry,
While the other barges wait like glowing embers
Lying still on the water till their turn has come.
By now Gargantua is walking through the trees,
In the midst of the janitors who guard the garden;
They steal away ahead in front of the others,
Stumbling through the darkness till they reach the garden wall
And edge along its shadow where the door is hidden;
Now the key has grated and they walk through the frame:
And I wait for them, hiding in a fruit-tree's shade.

They trod across the grass and came into the middle,
And there they started looking for the mandrake root.

Gargantua was on his knees with all the rest,
They were pulling up the weeds and sifting through the plants

As though they searched for grains of gold in the wet evening
grass.
I could hear distant voices and the sound of lutes
As they stood to rest a moment, stiff and tired from bowing.
Then there came the moonlight and it fell through the leaves
Lighting on Melulla as she stood there, still and quiet.
Gargantua was watching her, as at a window,
And when he saw the air so silver and so cool
That played around her body till it gleamed afar,
He ran to Melulla and held her in his arms.
I sounded out my trumpets and began to march,
Loud did my alarm fall on any ears that listened,
For I came to tell Gargantua of his second fall;
But though the others hearkened and could see my plumes,
Knowing me for who I was and frightened at my coming,
Melulla and Gargantua, deaf and blind as if asleep,
Paid me no heed though I was standing at their side.
Where is now the mandrake? Like the meteor, lost.
The silver cord is loosed. The golden bowl, broken.

CANTO THE THIRD

"In a small mountain resort near Vicenza where I spent the spring of 1881 I and my friend—also one who had been born again—discovered that the phoenix music that hovered over us, wore lighter and brighter plumes than it had done theretofore."

A LETTER
OF
FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

They slept—the two of them—with music lulled
Through a day-long night of dreaming
To its measures moved;
For Donne and Gargantua in their diverse spheres
Walked, each in his paradise, to the slur and stress of tunes.
Such green shades, fast as any ragtime built,
Formed like bricks into the shapes they loved:
To a wood of white statues, or a game of chance
Hazarded through trees.
The tides of light, drifting with the dwindling hours,
Climbed upon their window-sills, gave boundaries of shadow;
Sheer as a precipice were the edges of that moonlight,
And, leaving it, you moved from life to death and were forgotten.
Donne, in that mock life, stood at his window
For the galaxy within that mirror shown,
To number up their golden heads and tell the ripe about to fall:
He dreamt the quiet midnight and the opened casement,
And the shivering, showering tumble when the glass moved back,
Trembling in its leads.
Night, the noisy, silent night surrounded him like water:
The other sleeper
Dreamed in deeper measure with slow fancy, slow to form.

I pull them from their pleasures at a trumpet's sound.
Gargantua dressing.
Daylight, daylight, wedged within his window like a golden cone
Startled Gargantua with a din of brass
Battering at his eyelids;
He is in the window, at the source of light, stemming that quiet current,
His memory still mixing in the masques and the lit night
Among remembered nymphs,
Among spangles paler than the fire of eyes,
In imagined dalliance with those fine curved limbs,
Close to the flower mouth.
He dresses now to please them, pranked about with plumes,
At his mirror, or the opened window:
Like smoke, proudly frozen smoke, those tufts of feathers
Framing his solar face of manly red,
His hair, thick as bear's fur, cropped for a shade,
With forehead of a bridge-pier's strength and bulk
Made formidable his emptiness.
The high comic mirrors laughed in their fullness of his ripened shape
Sprouting from their borders;
As a toad too heavy for the pool he's found
Gargantua flounders at that echo's mouth,
Overlapping on to land.
Wind, its little madrigal among the leaves, now rattles at his windows
With soft fingers on the pane, or on the cold stone,
Beating out the harmonies for its sighing voice to cover;
All else is stirring, and the walls repeat
Their sounds of cloistered waking.

I was talking in the courtyard when he came below,
Heavy down the stairway through the murmuring arch
To the heaped and autumn bonfire leaves:
I was talking to the servants of their daily work,
Of how they must remember me and come to me with prayers,
Kneeling in the fleecy snow, or bowed before the sun's hot doors,
Facing all the seasons to where those gates should show
Thrown open at the farmyard bugle:[8]
They must work to my orders, bow which way I want,
Like the 'left-right' of the soldier that may never be 'right-left,'
While the soldier must obey and never question as to origins;
But Gargantua interrupted with a brutal coarse joke
Dispersing all their discipline. I slunk away.

The chapel bell, cold clapper through the frost's white light,
Called me away and I slunk to my own shrine,
To the feet of my statue in the morning mist.[9]
I had come here weary of omnipotence
But stooping to discussion I had lost my power
At a challenge of Gargantua,
That form of smoke in leather armour of his own thick hide.
Other gods had come to earth,
Shown through lightning's breaking glass, or shell borne down
blue fields of sea,
But poor as a beggar did I watch these two competitors,
My Cæsar and Pompey of these later shadows.
Think now,
If the cards of fate had pawned in other fields,
Had they mantled in dead shade the glittering hero of that
triumph,
How the trumpets could transmute his African, lone death
To dancing maidens, cymbals, bending airs of music,
To wind in high cornfields of the Nile's black land

When they grow their golden hair above that green falling flood
And wind runs shaking out their purses of young seed,
This for the cymbals dashed and rattling to their deaths;
While the flowing paths of music are tracks among the corn,
Bridges and footfalls like his marks upon the sea,
Moving with the clouds, pitched tents, or struck and moving.

The spoils of Africa,
Sand from green rivers sieved and fired for gold
Must load his horns of plenty:
It will lie like honey but far heavier,
For sand, bitter sand, and never honey, fills the hour-glass
Dropping in rhythm to the hours of honeyed light
That are matched in their cells of sun with this falling sad grain
of sea;
Skins striped with sunfire,
And monkeys, comic mirrors of our own bald shapes,
Are borne at the chariot wheel
With black prisoners, dead coals of hate.

Pompey is an arrogant high hollow fateful rider
In noisy triumph to the trumpet's mouth,
Doomed to a clown's death, laughing into old age,
Never pricked by Brutus in the statue's shade.
But Cæsar and Pompey were dead pawns to me
Moving down fields for ever fallow, never bearing,
And I cared not which killed the other
Snatching his mock-life of me;
While Donne and Gargantua, each in his sphere,
Walks without me and has the populace to work upon;
Each can win, each can lose, each can break his paper life,
Tugging at that kite through the thick and fiery winds,
Foul breath of crowds, battle pantings, whispered words of fate,

Till the string break:
When their souls survive but must forage for themselves,
For I cannot care for something that can never die.

Consider the changes since I held my hand!
How the world of metaphysics, the changing glass of dreams,
Hides in the gold-blowing wood that trembles at our windows,
Where Donne schemes safe within the casement harbour,
Close to those waters.

In the still hours of the silent tides,
When air is a smooth mirror,
The shining wood of starlight has come nearer to us,
Through time, and through the leads of depth and height,
Thrown like the sailor's line from golden tree to window
Where he waits at that glass shore for the crow's foot alley,
Quincunx, or lone trees of that fire-dropping balsam.
If he snares the wild wet meteor,
He has conquered other worlds
With sword, gun, or fishing line, of air or glass,
So merciful his weapon.
His word will be delicate, full of tragic artifice,
Tricking the meaningless,
Heaping intention where there is no purpose.
I can grant his fantasies,
The lit nights, bare days, dead bones of trees,
Cold shores, foamless,
Where Leviathan looms, rock like, and spouts among the surges
At wind's edge, close to shore;
I can load all seasons on the trees,
Green leaves, spring tide of foam,
And the autumn mist and bonfire
Under boughs of red apples, red as winter sun;

There is spiked, frost-telling hardness
And the wild wet raspberry, like Donne's meteor in gold thicket,
Grows over-ripe, bird-pecked, near to the bonfire smoke.

Gargantua loves no bitterness, no sad distinction in the dying
months,
Dwindling to winter,
His airs must be full-throated with thick boughs of shade,
Loud in voices;
If he finds the mandrake
He will not pare and thin away, refine what's there already,
Choosing from the flow of months what suits his fancy
But grow all into one galaxy, one live long summer,
With daytime of hot lolling hours and night close-roofed with
stars.
The sensual world will heave with breath for him
As the lobster cranking, shell-jointed in its tank,
Which you watch, and are afraid to eat.
Branches in that glaucous air will move and sigh,
Deep in their green amours, while the young tides of sea
Surge and faint back against the hot, naked shores:
But my vision cracked and fell from me.

Gargantua, while the mist spent, had gathered them together,
His tocsin I'd mistaken for a call to prayer,
But I dared not creep close enough and never heard him from
the porch,
For he spoke in low undertones.
By the rules of my own hazard, while I played at man,
Mortal sight and hearing were my bounds of power,
So I crept down the shadows and escaped the crowd.
Donne worked alone and never spoke at public meetings,
He had dressed in silence, eaten breakfast in his room,

And schemed at his table in an arsenal of papers.
For the viols and lutes of music, the weapons of that war of words,
He works with rhyme, that ancient shuddering cymbal,
Loud rattled, or struck with hammer blow, once sounding;
His desk, with Turkey rug deep-dressed,
His goose-quill by the ink's black pool,
The weapons on that parchment field.
Here is his day's battleground, by night's slow tides
He watches the heavens,
Looking among those wrecked worlds at the drifting weed of stars
Till his meteor falls.

Midday, the sloped watershed of light,
Parts the morning, the long faunal hours
Stay talking in the woods, for now one hears
Clang of sword and trumpet from the hard leaves
Hitting out, loud glittering, in the sharp falling light
Spilled like thrown water.
Cool pleasures call the Knights and Nuns together;
They ride in glass chariots by the flowing river
Racing its wrecked galleons of boughs and leaves
That run for the rocks upon tides of melted snow.
Some are caught among the shallows,
The Knights and Ladies in the chariots
See this ghost of Actæon, antler-headed, out of the sands[11]
Who waits in bitter sadness seeking pity for his fate
To melt cruel Winter's heart of snow;
But the river, brimming with that winter harvest,
Plays by his body, has no pity for him,
It mocks his longing with cold path of tides
That flow by his wasted limbs,

These waters, like the nymphs would, lean their flanks
And curve, water soft, their snowy breasts to him,
But they pass and never stay, they have no love for him.
That frail ghost is a parable, a myth to them,
Called forth by the hunter's horn, full of subtle meaning,
And the Knights stretch the parallel, they strain its meshes,
Fitting their own lives to that worn web of feeling.
There are other interludes in the noon's hot light;
They are hitting white spheres in a green court of grass[12]
Across a net's entanglement of hope or pain,
Hazarding their chances,
If the ball comes back again, swift message in soft answer,
Or whether at that hedge of hope it falls and faints;
Music, flower-like, hangs at every window
Mingling with its sisters,
A hundred voices and a hundred lutes throb in the wall's hot shade;
The fountains throw bright falling dice of water
That changes long before you see your fate,
Though fate is but an ebb or flow in tides of love,
And the throw of each fortune but a shadow on these waters,
A shade on the thinnest glass, a ghost in shallow mirrors.
Gargantua had promised them immortal life
And deathless beauty from their elixir,
This alchemy of dank leaves, low growing, never noticed;
The peasants, too near to life and earth, were not persuaded,
But the Knights and the Ladies took this surety for their pleasures,
They looked for the mandrake with Gargantua in the herb-garden,
Talking by those warm red walls close hung with netted fruit,
In the hot night when Gargantua deceived them,
Dallying with Melulla.
Yet this discovery had no shame for him,

Since they loved him for his human faults
He could work out his plans with no danger of exposure,
Sharing their frailties, and loved the more for them.

These two shadow worlds, the real and metaphysical,
Both shadows, since neither true nor false can be exact,
Are here for you to choose between;
You have two salvations, one quieter than the other,
Two deities and their rest homes;
Stabbed Cæsar and dead Pompey are ghosts in hollow porches
Inviting you to enter,
They guard the brothel doors but not to stop you entering.
Now my two present heroes have alternatives more pleasant,
One is a paradise that you enter through a herb-garden,
For the other you must watch the air, like a sailor the changing winds,
Posted many a night at casement harbours by those lead-locked pools,[13]
Waiting for the meteor's golden mine to drop
And open that fine quarry of philosopher's stone.
One hero makes speeches and the other works in silence,
At a seeming disadvantage, for but few people know him;
Yet his work is riskless if you think of Gargantua,
Fallen, and hated more because he once was loved.

If Gargantua is tempted and may fall, now and then,
Such are the Gods, and only Christians can deny this:
Those vaults of religion where blind faith is born,
The poet's Indian Caucasus of lovely rock-deep vales,[14]
Have tempted the divinely born before they grew to sanctity;
There does Thelema rise without the hand of man
Falling to Thebaid with the sharp green summer:
Till then, what raptures in the Indian evening,

So fiery the tempting that resistance is the greater sin;
(To deny yourself is pleasure where there is no pain,)
The rocks that have been thrones of fire come cool for our climbing
And this Indian heaven is our changeling for Thelema.
For the walls of the Abbey we have hedges of closed fire by night
That will open in the morning sun to flowers, ember mirrors,
Rayed and bearded like the sun they mock;
If Donne climbed with us in these spires of rock
He'd think that his meteor had passed this way,
Flying low above the windy hills,
And roofing for one moment with wings of gold
The rocks and leaves its plumes have touched.
Here is where temptation springs, like water from a cold stone
It breaks of a sudden from the bitter heart of rock;
Boughs turn to limbs to help the leaves' green hair
And warm breasts of love grow where the flower should be:
For trumpet to this pleasant war the Indian bird
Croons, dove-soft, its double note of warning:
But when the Indian summer burns too deep
With hoarse, sweet voice, sharp rind like lime,
That bird will sing this Southern clime
In that far-off valley among green, steep,
Rookery trees by the towers of Thelema,
While it mocks with its 'Cuckoo,' 'Cuckoo,'
Our bells that each have but one theme;
Though ringing them together their hundred tongues
Will thrash and beat the air,
And when those iron words are dead
The cuckoo in its green cloud, in the young plumes of spring,
Croons, sweet and hoarse, and dares an answer from us.
It rides on another's nest, down winds of an alien spring,
Changing the torrid Indian sun

For this light among green branches where the airs are young.
This heaven of temptation, this court of deep and restless
thoughts,
Echoes with that mockery of the Indian air,
Soft trumpet blown to break the knots of love,
Or does this double note, two halves of prayer,
Cry the two shadow worlds, the real and metaphysical?

We left Gargantua at the chapel door speaking to the servants,
Though he uses other methods with the Knights and Ladies,
Not rhetoric, but the wiles of conversation,
He talks in deep gardens, or at the courts of hazard,
Those risks and chances give him parables,
Spicing his argument;
This summer day the spheres of hazard
Are talismans of snow, let us suppose,
Pressed by hands that keep their souls engraved
On this logic water that the eye can mark,
They are thrown on their risks above the webs of love
Whether they are snared, or keep their ounce of winter
In a little last of rime against the green hours of summer:
This would be his parable of quick surrender,
Or long siege of constancy
To conquest turned.
Such is the sensual world, of melting, or enduring,
And I hold it next the other one, sharp war of the spirit,
Fighting for nothing, with no token won, or lost,
Out of endless battles, in deserts, and heaped cold,
The very fuel of winter.
You can choose between these hazards, or salvations;
Stabbed Cæsar and dead Pompey are ghosts in hollow porches
Inviting you to enter,
They guard the brothel doors but not to stop you entering.

In long winter, when dark day is night,
Since the roofs of Thelema on a slant for snow
Are steep in that pale thatch,[16]
The eaves of slant moonlight dipped into the day,
We will march our heraldry from courts of hazard
And melt it a red fire, at a hecatomb of fir-cones,
That burn their quills of resin for our flames of legend;
There does Gargantua, on this crater-edge of firelight,
Build the embers into towers and caves,
For this is his winter-war in wiles of talk,
While my other hero in these goose-plumed days[17]
Plots at his table with quill-pen and paper.
The courts with feather-litter of the cold are filled[18]
And the dead woods hear no hunting-horn,
But drop, now and then, their burdens in one footfall;
These evening legends to dark pits of ghosts
Grow in Gargantua's parallels to the cold,
For he matches the winter with its raps on door and window,
By iron-mail on the winding stair
And a white horse at barred windows that no hand dare open.

Here do I leave them for a night of noises,
My Tarzan, my ape-man, whom I'll make again,
And the old philosopher in his cell of books;
We will leave them at the fireside till we break into their legends
And knock the red logs into a light to show their faces.
Yes! stay there!
Except we move you, up dark stairways,
For your night in the black pit of ghosts,
Till I wake you with a fanfare and you take your places,
Just where we leave you, at red towers and caves.

CANTO THE FOURTH[19]

Another day. Another golden cone[20]
Wedged in the windows like a din of brass
Battering at tired eyelids;
But they took the morning in their hands and dressed,
Not trusting steely pools of mirror
That lied in loud voices.

The stiff air, misted, hid the Abbey towers
As each looked through his window for the clock's sun face
And saw creeping hour and climbing sun in one;
Through the tree-locked harbours of the fog, sun went,
Till sail after sail above the green tree coasts
Lifted and was gone.
Donne and Gargantua, like clock and sun,
Were timed to each other,
And they breathed the gilded air of this steep hour together
Walking the garden in the slant gold of morning.

When he heard their heavy voices,
The swan who was sleeping in his tower of reeds
Broke those walls and trod the rushes into the water,
He was gone like snow upon a stream for them;
But they walked, looking closely at the ground beneath,
And never saw this launching of a cloud,
Though the towers of Thelema built themselves again
And glittered with that cloud against their windows
Out of the water.

Still at their argument they were at the lake's far side
With the mirrored trees below them,
And now, with this water-gulf between ourselves,
We can turn and see the morning till they reach our side.

The Knights and the Ladies, or they're monks and nuns,
Are walled like the swan, but with a stronger stone,
For they waste the winter-morning till the sun is high
In this honeycomb of pleasures,
Not rising into the cold out of remembered happiness
But they keep the green rushes and the towers of leaves
Blowing fresh for them,
That will tremble into distance when they reach the frosty pane.
This is their wisdom, and my two protagonists
Have broken their subtleties;
Their feet, and only bird-feet,
Print the sad grass,
There is no other foot upon this shore of morning,
But Donne and Gargantua have met their old traces
And come back mingling with these minute dead,
They pattern past and future with the moment's mark;
They are the walls between these times,
That move, but not with either,
For their bulk is our fine watershed
And watching through the window
Time has its arbiter in their two shapes,
That march where they please, but carry fate with them.

I was coming from the chapel when they passed me by
And made for that labyrinth, the dwarves' low wing,
Where Gargantua was a house-top giant
To one pillar of their banquet-hall;
There did they part, and Donne went to his studies

While Gargantua gathered all the dwarves around him.
They came like sparrows after crumbs of bread
With tottering run and lame in all their haste,
Their little heads too big for them, their lolling tongues
Babbling his praises.

From far Mantua on the banks of Po[21]
Had they come to Thelema, to this court of hazards,
Changing the madrigals of chiming water
For sighing reeds and sad bells from the steeple;
And he spoke to them of Mantua and the gods at banquet,
Painted for an echo to the feast below;
They told him the dead legends and their acted life,
How Cupid married Psyche in the secret wood
And the dwarves sat at their table for the gods above.
This past, this mirrored poetry,
Brought the sliding river and its swans of snow,
And the dwarves talked of the palace and its painted heavens;
The feast was in the green wood, the satyrs came,
And drank the nettle-wine that makes a virgin of each tree.
This was the painted world of Giulio Romano,
Who worked on the ceilings and the walls of Mantua,
He opened four walls into the winds of heaven
Making a paradise of all that lay above,
Where Cupid and Psyche were for ever kissing
And the gods with their minions feasted and made love;
They were tired of ease, and of the daughters of the barley,
If a milk-maid yielded at a hedge of roses
Her lips were no sweeter than the eglantine
And its savours were legion to her one quick bloom;
They turned from these surrenderings that gave no quarter,
Down the country roads that were a town of flowers,
And then the eagles screamed, and the hard, heroic flesh

Bled once again before the walls of Troy;
These were the histories the dwarves had seen
And they fired Gargantua with the banquet of the gods,
He told the Knights and Ladies, and they fixed the hour.

All day, the scullions and mitred cooks
Worked by the dragon-mouths and fed their maws,
The dwarves came to the kitchen, but the tongues of fire
Stood as steep above them as the fox-glove to the bee
And they could not climb to them upon the wind,
Nor crawl into the flower-mouth for the honey there;
Yet, for all this danger, did the dwarves stand near
To see this magic in the smoke's high cowls,
How sweetness, melted from the sugar-canes,[22]
Made houses tall enough for dwarves to live
And built up castles from the brake's wild dew,
Carving door and window from that field of flutes
That sighed and rattled, once, and soothed the turbaned darkness
And took back the negro to Niger's pleasant plain,
The black-man's river, where his harvest ripened
And slaves of his own stood in the golden corn.

So a sugar-palace on the trestles stood,
And pies of venison, with berries from the woods,
They carried from the kitchen to the banquet-hall,
Flourished by trumpets to their every step;
Those horns in stony corridors,
Like hunters winding in a land of rock,
Lost and found themselves at each new curve
And at last were in this valley where the tables were,
With trees and hills of tapestry, and woven stories
To pour cool airs into the slanting autumn,
And the happy loves provoke by this mirror to their wishes.

It was a ripening of Time's dead flowers
And all the winds were lilies and sweet rain,
With no tumult, and not sad like tears,
But every breath brought memories and gave them life,
The empty hours to fulness turned, the grave was warm
And but a summer morning, sleeping late
From torch-lit comedies upon the water,
Or a trembling sleep pursued, but not in fright,
When Actæon, once known, once loved,
Looked through antler-branches at the stream
And, till it was too late, (Ah, cold, how cold it is!)
The woods and the river sang immortal love;
Then, hair was golden that to dust relapsed
And stayed in its stone coffin till the trumpets rang,
When corruption into flesh turned back and the happy airs wore
lilies.

This was one fulfilment, with the tomb denied,
And the other, just as sad, but with no death in it,
Broke the locks and fetters that the living wear;
They left their prison and took up the threads of Time,
Nor found the bright cloaks ragged that they'd left so long ago,
Stretched in a clover-field, or to catch the fruit-trees' snow,
When bees were in those honey-curls, and a cuckoo from the
boughs
Mocked their happiness and hid himself in mystery;
The cloaks still had colour and again they shone,
But this was life's alternative, its dead futurity,
And these were the ends of all untrodden paths
Leading from the doorways of what might have been.
It was a doubtful paradise with sorrow hung
Where the present fetters had but left the wrists
And every breath taken was a muted sigh,

Hushed for secrecy, and low in sadness,
For the shackles soon fall and then it's dark again,
Not the night of day, but that deeper and tremendous gloom,
The spirit's cold prison, with the heart for tolling bell,
Never, never ceasing, for every hour is wasted.

They feasted on the bracken and the briars of autumn,
For this was what the deer ate, and these were the berries,
The harvest was gathered in, the night soon came;
It was maturity, the bleeding of the grape,
And the pillars of this deity stood higher than the dwarves,
To-morrow to be trampled by a thousand feet:
Its blood grows stronger in the cellar's must
Until this sacrifice begins to work,
Now carried from the darkness to the loud-lit banquet
To let dead memories come from their tombs;
But in these meetings, that were dreams fulfilled,
Gargantua remembered what the dwarves had told him,
How the walls and ceilings of their home were opened
And space was powdered with a hundred clouds
Ridden as chariots, or to beds of love
Changed from the trumpet and the clang of armour,
And he told the Knights and Ladies of those Mantuan hours,
How to make a mirror for these wanton pleasures
And pitch their tents against the walls of Troy,
Not minding Trojan histories, but tied to their intent,
So that this siege was the yielding of a heart
And to-day's fine stratagems were ten years wasted,
Lived in vain because they went back to the grave,
But yet they had reality and blood ran through them,
So what was wasted was not wholly spent.

Rub not your eyes at any ghost you see;

Hark, hark, to the clarions, this is their march
Who have but breath in them to live this while
And then go back into oblivion!
Though, now, they glitter like a laurel-wood
It is our thinking that is sun to them,
This is their life, fading, dying with a thought,
For I cannot give it back to them and break my harmony,
Spoiling the hazards of the game I play.
If they were immortal and could never fall
Then this symposium of the lilied air
Would be their ordinary, their day's expectance,
A dinner in a restaurant, no more than that.
Where time can burn, and waste can never be.
What are the sighings, or the smiles, of love?
This is my loss, who started that machinery,[23]
That I live outside its orbit and it cannot touch me,
So must this banquet be a company of ghosts
Only brought back to you to share the feast;
They will lie beside you in their crowns of flowers
And die before those very flowers are dead,
While I, who am immortal, wish for death
So I could but join you, mingling with your ghosts.

Then the past lay open in a catch of breath
And music bore the metamorphosis,
Hiding its mysteries till they were worked;
The painted siege, and all its ardours of dead years,
Came back to the banquet in a hundred shapes,
Moulded to each destiny, to break its seals,
And give reality its shadows back;
What never happened, or was half achieved,
Grew, now, into fruition, to accomplishment,
While things begun, but lacking their continuance,

Flowed with no interval, no hindrance, to them
Into perpetuity, imprisoned there
Till Time from those bastions came back again.
This was a shadow-world where spectres walked,
To happy banks of flowers transmuted,
Where siege and surrender, to a moment bound,
Mocked the long years and made a victory from defeat;
There was nothing ghostly in this flesh and blood,
Though fed on roses and the sighing flowers,
Of no more substance than a summer dream;
But the clouds, giddy chariots, came down into the trees,
Hiding that green livery with the nymphs they brought,
Who lay like goddesses above the earth,
Or dropped, and never touched it, in a happy swing
Strung from the boughs for the pleasure of fine tempting.

The banquet-hall, breaking from its walls of stone,
Grew to a cosmogony, an universe of pleasures,
Spiced, though, with sadness, for they could not last:
Music opened its winged moods for them,
Floating, half in heaven, half on earth, as did that swing
Which dropped a golden nymph, and drew her back again
Until that thing of melody, that lovely body,
Fell like a fruit into the lap of grass;
The ilex and the myrtle-wood
Brought with a tune their dying youths to life
Who rallied in the sweet wind and found again,
Each one his nun, who for the love of him,
Had stayed a virgin in this paradise of harmony;
They walked once more in the odorous, cool glade
Praying they might die and be together there,
Like Pyramus and Thisbe, who their tryst still keep
And blame not each other that they both are dead.

"Oh! Cannot I die with you and share your sleep,
There could not be such cruelty that we cannot dream
And live by that fiction in the shadowed land,
Walking hand in hand among the lost and lonely,
By flowers that are scentless, fit only for the tomb
To last through Time and know not death's corruption."
"Come with me, then, to where we once were happy
In a noon shut close between two banks of cloud,
For I live there, now, with rain in either valley,
Dawdling that moment to eternity;
I travel no further than the rain's first kiss
Which tastes sadly sweetened by your tears."
But nothing changed in her, the nun's sad thoughts
Were all this resurrection, for his ghost knew not
That memories make live and never kill.

This Mantuan banquet copied from its clouds,
Where Cupid and Psyche on a painted ceiling
Were neighbours to the heroes of perpetual war,
Turned from feasting to a long lament,
For nothing could come of it, these were but dreams
Lifting for a little the iron locks and fetters
Which only felt more heavy when they closed again.
On every side was weeping, and the bluebell wood
Trembled in its mist, but let the dove's low croon
Point this alien beauty of the spring's blue robe,
That lands of asphodel and thyme had never known,
Where the bees made honey from the sweet, blue distance,
Working these few days as if the world, and not a wood,
Made this kingdom of the dove's soft rule;
Here, then, was plenitude, where happiness should be,
But the Knights and Ladies lost it, and the beauty palled.

What fields are lilied as this bluebell-wood,
That breathes with one impulse like the sea's salt tide,
And has its mimic surges, and its strength drawn back,
When dove, or cuckoo, in the elm is heard?
But, to these phantoms at the banquet-board,
The scent of the lilies, though weaker than a whisper,
Was loud as life beside their muted death;
The Knights and Ladies and their loved companions
Had no intercourse, no touch of lips,
They were close together as the lily-heads
And never words came, even the eyes spoke not,
Those swiftest messengers of what is meant.

The horses of this legend, like a drift of snow,
Moved in ghostly smoothness as a cloud above a sea;
Where Helen waited for the kiss of Faustus
He cried into his horse's mane and saw her not:
This was my philosopher, my poet-hero,
Half-way among the spirits, for this ghost without a soul,
This horse that was snow, or cloud, that had no mind,
Bowed to his will and was his steed to carry him
Through his Time-journey till he reached her side;
But this other depth into the world of phantoms
Lay too far for him, its soul had fled,
And so he never looked at her, that cold, dead thing,
That cast-off coil, as if a snake lay there.
Was this not misery, a worse despair
Than the sadness of Gargantua, that man of clay
Whose dreams were too material to match a ghost?

This was the day when all Thelema wept,
Their banquet, taken from the Wars of Troy,
Was, at once, a moment, and eternity,

No time for anything, and too much time:
So did this heaven of freewill and liberty
Change into a prison that was barred and bolted;
This was the saddest day of all their lives
And the bells of Thelema with a shuddering curfew
Called back the shadows from the forlorn feast.

This was my doing in the black-capp'd steeple,
For these Mantuan pleasures in this colder clime
Made weep the clouds and brought my monks and nuns to tears;
But Donne and Gargantua took their cue and went.
Passing with these shadows through the postern-gate,
They left this abbey where they'd lived so long
And walked through the night towards the rising sun,
Making to the right of this, into the South,
Where learning withers not, but sleeps the heat away
In a mountain-cave, or deep among the poplars;
This is another wisdom, of no gold and silver,
Not hedged with walls, or spangled with rich ores,
But spoken by the leaves and by the babbling brook,
In words caught slyly by the traitor-air,
That breathes its balm and flattery upon the wind,
With hard thoughts hidden in its painted truths;
At their first mountain we will listen to them,
Looking for the cave and for the cooling stream,
In green arches of Arcadia,
Near the snows.

CANTO THE FIFTH[24]

The volcano passed, and the black plain of lava,
They crossed the hills and saw another gulf
With great Calabria on its far side,
And came at night, there were no shepherd's fires,
To stone pillars
That rose with no warning from the asphodels;
They climbed the steep plinth into that roofless shelter
And lo! another temple threw its shadow to them
That broke their pillars with its dark, straight beams,
But this they heeded not, it gave them shade;
They slept, each hidden in the echo of a column,
That soon passed over them and made them dream,
And then more pillars came and lay beside them,
Till this cage with all its solid bars
Swung right away from them to mark the plain;
It moved like a clock and told the lengthened hours,
Though no one watched them, and the past was dumb,
So dead, so silent, that it had no progeny
And nothing but the moonlight spoke, or stirred.

The dew came upon them, even in this temple,
It clung like sweat upon Gargantua's limbs,
But lay on the philosopher as rain from shaken flowers,
So the giant, another Hercules, dreamed of his strength,
And the other, that he wandered where blossom touched his face
In a promise of strange fruit to his imaginings.
The plain of asphodel, the flowers of death,

Showed not itself, and no wind was in its petals,
Rattling paper crowns, that are so light to wear
That the field is a dynasty, all dead at once;
Even the lizard and the ant were still:
The draughty sky, so empty, with no clouds in it,
Spoke not, nor breathed, in its immensity,
Till a sudden rushing from that nothing came,
Far off, yet near, and like no other wind,
For it blew to all quarters of the earth at once,
As a herald's trumpet, but not waiting for his changes.
This was the messenger that woke the world,
One voice, and then another, called,
But it was no cockcrow
For this was a dead plain where no men lived,
The eagle from his eyrie sprang, the hawk spread his wings,
And the mountains were lit while yet the plain was dark.

When light reached the temple where our heroes lay
It passed like a butterfly before their eyes,
Hovering, and fanning them with painted wings,
They woke in its pattern, and the first who stood
Saw the ocean whitened with a hundred sails[24]
Moving as swallows from the coast of cliffs,
But a steady breeze carried them, that never shook their wings,
And they lay so far away they seemed quite still.
These were fishermen with net and trident,
Come from the terraces that make my scene,
For, while I write, I see the same white sails
And know that Pæstum lies across the bay;
But Gargantua looking through the Eastern pillars
Saw the great mountain with its crest of snow[25]
Lying away into the wilderness;
This was Mount Alburnus that has never changed

Since Virgil wrote of it to give it fame;
They knew this not, and yet its desolation
Was older, more sacred, than the ruined temples,
And they walked from those pillars to the mountain-foot.

Many hours ahead of them its slope began
And long before they reached to it the pillars vanished,
Fading into nothingness in that plain of paper flowers;
The mountain, steep and terrible, towered up before them,
And yet they fled to it, to hide away from men.
Now they were lifted on its tented sides,
The sea, far below them, had no threat to them
For wind had blown the fishing-boats, like petals, to one side;
Everywhere was solitude, a wilderness of rocks,
Burnt in fearful fire, and by the earthquake heaped[26]
To a black symbol of destruction where nothing lived,
A zone of death below the mountain's life,
Which they reached to, at last, and left the rocks behind.

Soon they were hidden in the chestnut-wood,
Where the slant day came cooler through the boughs,
Made colder yet by loudly falling water
Which dropped from higher ledges where the ilex grew,
That Virgil wrote of, so he may have walked here,
Listening for music in that haunted air.
Light failed and fainted in the ilex-wood
And its embers made their evening fire,
Soon changed for the moon above the mountain snow
That embalmed the night and put its perfumed breath
In every sighing of their happy slumber,
So the heart fed on flowers while the mind lay still,
And they woke, not knowing how the night had passed.
They were so deep within the ilex-wood

That the sea had vanished and their whole small world
Was no more than this forest and its tumbling streams,
Where berries grew among the rocks for them,
And, while they quarrelled with the birds for these,
The stones hurled to frighten them fell through the briars
And led them to a nut-tree, thickly strung,
That they shook, and rattled down, like pebbles of the hail
This catch of hazels, the red squirrel's bread.

Here, in the violated shade, they sat
In the high noon feeding on this savage harvest
And cupping the water with their stained hands,
Turned black and tawny with the berries' blood;
They ate, and were hungry, and heeded not the stranger.
He stood beside them like a wind among the leaves,
So they turned not to look at him, but only felt the difference
As a sudden blowing in the ilexes,
A stretching of cool shadow to their resting-place:
He spoke not, then they felt him.

He was tall and looked between the leaves at them
In a white robe hiding all his length,
With high black headgear, like a wizard or a priest,[27]
That crowned his eagle nose and his black eyes
Above a snowy beard that half his height concealed;
One hand pressed the boughs to make a window for him,
And the other, to support his age,
Was laid on the little fawn that guided him,
Where its horns grew not yet, between its velvet ears,
That were warm, not from sun, but with its love for him.
It stood so near to them they saw its eyes,
As shining anemones, as sea-flowers moving,
While the dappled coat and slender feet were still

And it seemed to shrink from them, to be afraid;
But Gargantua picked berries from a briar and tempted it,
For it ran with little steps to them, and brought its master,
Then lay to eat the fruit and dropped its head from him,
So he sat beside them in the ilex-shade.
For long he spoke not, and his words, once born,
Were the emanation of his age and wisdom,
Formed, of themselves, into the limbs of speech,
That his warm voice clothed, so they were hidden in its fire,
Yet his heat was but an ember, the hot ashes of his age.
This was old Faunus in his secret wood,
For ever dwelling here, but now embodied,
Called up as a phantom, or a common ghost,
By these pilgrims flying from the court of love;
Like this, the waterfalls and singing streams
All have their spirits who can speak in words,
And wind or rain among the boughs has meaning.
But now their fancies that had borne this shape
Broke silence.
"I have come, this morning, out of nothingness,
Hearing the tread of feet, for I knew it was no shepherd,
Since they go softly on the fallen leaves
And are half goat as to the way they climb;
Sometimes for deeper silence in the high, hot noon
They take the goat-bells from the shaggy beards
And sleep, quite naked, by a tumbling stream,
For a nymph in that mystery to come to them;
But they travel no further than the first thick shade,
And have never reached into this hidden heart.
When sun came to the mountain I was still asleep,
But my fawn came running to me and I found
It led me straightway through the ilex-wood,
Till I heard the shaken nut-tree and the rain of hazels,

Yet you brought me, it was not the fawn,
And I knew your coming and the reason for it."

"Tell us why you stay here on this lonely mountain,
For how long forgotten and forsaken of all men,
Is this your abbey, where you've vowed to dwell,
A cloister, or prison, built nearly in the snow,
Where you cannot look beyond the trees, or hope
For any changes but the season's clock;
Where only shadows walk with you, grown tall or dwarfed,
Their only difference, by the day's old climb.
Give us some comfort, who are sad as you!"

Then the fawn came up to them, as if it heard,
And rubbed its budding horns on them, its huge, dark eyes
Shining with love, for all its fear had gone,
While wind, like a little ghost, crept to them
And played in the branches as a flight of birds;
This was the sea-wind in the dwindling day
That hardly reached them through the ilex-wood,
So walled was this prison,
But its breath brought the trees to life
And put new strength into that failing voice,
For such was this phantom with the little fawn.
"Long ago, when I was young,
I loved the dank nettles and was happier in them,
Looking for berries that were all my bread,
Than those who feasted in a palace,
Who were bound by rule and could not stay or go;
For how could I eat with either gods or men,
Running to the banquet from the tangled woods.
I showed in their windows as a garden-ghost
And chilled the pools of shadow like a statue of cold stone

Fled from the fountain or the Cyprian glade;
Then I changed from a spectre into life,
And sat, a hairy anchorite, by their smooth bodies
At the banquet-table in a rain of petals
Watching the oil of roses from the slave's fair curls
Run down their neck and shoulders, so they walked in flowers
And trod the rose's sisters with their fine quick legs,
While roses breathed from them each step they took;
This torch-lit life I loved, but was outside it,
Only their guest for what they learned from me,
Which was no help to them, but surfeited their pride,
For the Greeks were but talkers, and their frothing lips
Made a foam of poetry and nothing more;
It was a cloud above a gulf of islands,
Not tied to any mountain, but big enough to hide in,
Blown from heady precipice to chasms where the heart stops,
Where they saw no danger in their love of speed
And looked with calm eyes to either side of them;
They had their own guile and needed not my craft."

"Did you teach them nothing, had you never pupils?"

"Not so late, but in the earlier times
When my race of fawns still kept to their full muster,
Summer came but once in a man's life,
So all was forgotten but the legend of it,
When even the berries were withered on their briars;
No snow had fallen on the hills that year,
The wells were empty sockets for their eyes had gone,[28]
Till that last dire noon, fearful drumhead of the heat,
When our spring, faithful fountain, at its stem was snapped
And danced no more for us to its own music
Under low leaves that hid it from a stranger;

Then earth like a rattle shook, the storm's white powder
Lit in the immensity and fell upon us,
With hundred thunders following it,
And dreadful silence in between its rage,
Till the earthquake came again with fire and noise
And rain, scarce shaken into drops, struck with it,
So our stream, in a moment, was a tumbling river
Snarling at young rocks that in the waste had risen
And were like whale-backs in a shallow sea,
So sudden their coming in the grass or corn.
For days we hid ourselves, while nothing stirred,
No wings in the heavens ever crossed the sun,
Or sang in the boughs, no more the rabbits played
Close to the mine-mouth of their secret galleries,
No voice or movement in this desolation,
Save that from water, all the day and night
Hurrying in tumult.
But I saw the husbandmen, one August dawn,
Start their slaughter in the storm-swept fields;
In a day the broken harvest into order changed,
Beginning at its edges, where that honeycomb was trodden,
For the way to the water-wells lay down that field
And they stood in the path they knew and fought into the corn,
At midday, when they rested, being hidden in its heart
With their way hewn behind them who must fight ahead;
By then we were starving, for our nuts and berries
We'd finished long before, and in that early autumn
The squirrel had not hoarded and we could not raid him,
Thinning his plenty in a day or two
While he slept, it would be winter, in his hollow tree,
Like a King long-tombed with all his robes fine-kept,
Of red-gold fur, thick mantle and long train,
Wrapped warm around him.

So from our misery, this once in a long age,
I took my fawns along that harvest-lane
And made them careful not to steal the corn,
Nor pluck one stalk of it to play with hunger,
But come quite humbly among the houses
Begging for bread at every open door,
For they live in summer with every house made one
And only for snow and rain their doors are shut."

"Did they know you for yourself, and were the cow-horns blown?"

"It was their legend come suddenly to life
And at once they bargained for their bread with us,
Treating for our secrets to advantage them;
They gave us bread, and killed the lambs at milk,
Blowing the herd-trumpets for the women at the river
To bring them and their young swains back,
That youth lose no wisdom in this sacred hour,
And they came gleaming wet, finely naked, to the tree,
Clothed little more for all the skins they wore,
Of fleeces, heavy with their curls of snow,
Flung quick to keep the sunset wind away,
But open to the breasts with every limb left free,
Showing to beauty from that bulk of wool;
They came to the pine-tree shade, forewarned,
Their temple of one pillar, to all purpose turned,
To pray, or vow, or meet in lengthened shade,
As now, for this communion with ghosts come back;
We were rocks or rivers into bodies turned,
For what we meant to them,
With voices from the cave-mouth given us
To speak in oracles;

But I knew this stupidity and would not talk,
Making few signs to them, and those too easy,
Of nothing but our wants, which once fulfilled
I sent a panic wind among the sheaves of corn
That shook them into music with a hundred sudden hushes,
Broken for no reason into tune again,
At one or other of these pyramids or tents;[29]
For a whisper as of words in some deep shadow came,
And then we were deafened by a hundred tongues at once,
Speaking, all sibilant, from bearded mouths;
This was my first mystery, and then the fawns
Started their dances in the haycock town,
Behind the houses in a street of stacks,
On an open threshing-floor where no blown straw
Caught to their hooves or clogged the pleasant sound
Tapping rapid time above the thin, reed flutes,
That the elder of the fawns blew, with wind to help;
By now it was the afterglow, the sun had gone,
But the dance and the music kept on into the darkness,
Until the sickle-moon climbed out from the corn
And her light through these tents came to the threshing-floor
With as many shades from them as fawns were dancing.

This was so long ago I've near forgotten it
And only remember shadows and more shadows,
You'll know how long ago from how I speak,
As a torrent unstemmed, or as a monk set free;
But this happening of a hundred years a hundred times at once
    was true
For then my scholars came from all the world,
To cypress-hill or wilderness of myrtle,
Or anywhere that odorous shadows fell
And wind spoke in voices through the branch-lulled air.

I taught my wisdom to the babbling spring
That never once was silent, though we never listened,
We were so busy with new beauty found;
The stem of the cypress shook its pollen as we leaned,
In those million sun-motes making its own day;
It was only then we knew the setting-sun
And that hour of sadness till another world,
So simply, so easily, the night transmutes,
Changing the same elements to others hid in them
So that the flowers like little flames gone out
Hide their substance, while the blind eyes of other flowers,
Not seen by day and never reaching for the light,
Burn with sudden pallor, and their arduous breath,
More like a wind than any scent, it is so strong,
Wave upon wave along the darkness runs;
Then the cymbal shivered as the torch was lit
And the far-off dance blew nearer with the gale,
Though none could find it who did not share its secret.
Look, my friends, how all that pride has gone,
How this hill alone is all my shrunken state,
By the cold rocks among the stunted trees;
I wander like the blind with but a child to lean upon,
For the blood, born of shepherds and of goats, ran thin
And I have nothing but this fawn I've trained
That was left in misery by the cruel huntsmen,
One evening that it was too dark to follow;
And now we stay here, going ever and again
Upon the high mountain for the view from it,
Down to the wide sea and the shattered temples;
I am no mystery, for what have I to hide,
But my poor bones and my memories,
Tell me why you've called me from the long-dead past,
How a ghost can help with but the breath of words

In this altered earth of nothing that I knew,
And then into deadness let me go again."

So our two heroes, so silent for so long,
Spoke to old Faunus of the weeping abbey,
And that the banquet staged by them for pleasure,
By its very easiness in all desires,
Made every happiness into a hell,
Since conquest had no meaning where defeat was not,
And no alternative meant nothing gained;
It was all a hollow victory for a prize of paper crowns
And they mourned their pains this earthly paradise had healed
For the Knights and the Ladies blamed our heroes for their tears,
Who told old Faunus how they fled from the banquet,
Not daring to stay longer in that broken ruin,
And journeyed to the South into this plain of paper flowers,
The wilderness of asphodel that rattled the tumbled pillars
And woke them with the dawn-wind in the temple
Where the mountain that Virgil loved rose up before them.
Old Faunus wept with them at the fall of his own heaven,
Not earthly like their's, but to the same fate doomed,
Though his had but the luxuries of mind to wall it,
And it had no bastions or black-capped towers;
So then it was cheaper to create, it needed but the spirit,
And the three of them in argument of that economy
Agreed to build again that very autumn,
For its need was the communion of their three spirits
And all three were hiding and were happiest together.

So the little fawn led them to the wood's deep heart,
Till they came to the spring, the fountain of that music,
And found the cave of Faunus in the cliff above,
His cell where he had hidden since his heaven fell;

Such was their home, a very different abbey,
But the bare scaffold of an airy building
Their minds built quick and put away again,
For it changed at every moment of their argument
And the giant and the philosopher were happy in it,
More happy than in luxury by gilded roofs.
These madrigals of water, and the leaves' bright lutes,
Were real and living, and not dying echoes,
And this was but the dawn of every live-long day,
Before the shadow-clock began its march,
Turning, turning, like the donkey at the water-wheel;
Then came the authentic noon, the silent faunal hour,
And every evening was a world's great end;
Thus they lived, and this was their communion,
Hark! hark! to its sad melodies.

CANTO THE SIXTH[30]

All this time, I, the Almighty and Creator,
Am a poor pilgrim on haphazard roads
Losing my authority to a sham god,
Whom now, for my wager, and in hopes to get them back,
I must hand all my powers, as a box of keys,
Until I interrupt his harmonies.
Look! He is working, and his torpid, slow, tremendous hours
Climb to their zenith in the sun-locked heavens.

He had moved from his mountain to a hill of poplars,
And it is a different land, another universe,
For thyme and parsley, all a hero's crown,
They tread with their feet, and the myrtle and the laurel
Make the air odorous as with oil for the athlete;
Those sharp and bitter scents breathe more loud
Than the poplars' low Dodonian tune
That is scentless, sightless, perpetual as water,
Like gentle, sweet rain in a month that it rains not
For ever talking in a Babylon of tongues;
The ocean has its islands and the air its mountains
All round this hill, and seen through every branch of it,
With no sign of man save a temple on a cliff,[31]
Vowed to Poseidon, and of snow-white marble,
But a fragile basket for the wind and sea
To heap with their airs like many petals blown;
But this is no ruin for it has its priests,
The resined incense smoulders on the altar

And seen, now and then, between these babbling leaves,
Down the long shadows of the burnt-out day,
A yoke of white oxen climb at sunset to their stable
Who left for their journey at the dawn before.
There are no other men, no shepherds and no huntsmen,
And only this one deity by two priests tended,
Till Poseidon's festival and the wine-stained throng.
Are there not hills enough, and rocks, to hide in
And only this thing lacking that the oaten-pipe
Had not the music of its sister sown by man,
As it grows, where wind fell, close among the lilies?
Lo! the lesser gods make their concert in those flowers,[32]
Standing like statues by the mossy throne of Faunus,
The dryads, half-virgin and half-tree, sing there,
But only in slow syllables, for they know no words,
To music from blown reeds, tall as their dappled shoulders,
That are played by the lips as rods held in the air;
And these are the demi-gods, smooth athletes of the heavens,
Who, for this conspiracy of music,
Have the stars and strange signals of the night to help,
That burn in this daylight, so the hunter's moon
Hangs as a crown above the head of Faunus
Through all this mystery of night in day.

Such is their music in the lily-field,
And Donne and Gargantua at the side of Faunus
Saw the symbols by the head of every fawn
And wondered at them, if they had meaning:
They hung many histories upon those lights
As cobweb tapestry that time had clouded,
Worked thick with purposes forgotten of all men.
This was dawn, and the dying stars of morning,
Singing from the fawn's lips and from the fickle dryads,

Faded, one by one, into the fiery heavens
Putting Sylvanus all alone among the lilies,
While the giant and the philosopher, made drowsy by the scent,
Trusted not the testimony of their own eyes
Which might have cheated them with pretty visions.

This was the first miracle, and now the second,
For the stream's gentle music as it dwindled in the rocks
Turned to real voices and to mocking laughter,
Which with a bending of the river-bed,
Fulfilled its promise at a terrace of fine sand
Where the smooth machinery of love worked fast,
Of apple-breasts, as firm and cold as that,
And limbs to choose among, more quenching than the snow,
Or to nectarine and apricot burned ripe,
Both sorts, the fainting and the ardent, shown
Curving like shells that up or downwards turned
Show their open volutes or translucent backs.

Their shorn curls, fleeces that for gold were clipped,
The river's cool fingers to new locks had twisted,
With little marks of red upon the neck's clean stem
And, below, upon their bodies,
The hundred bruisings of the yellow crocus,
In its travesty by water-weed, had touched their skins.
There was no stranger, no Actæon, to fear
And they lay or moved, not knowing all this beauty born,
As when one of them, the nectarine-fleshed,
Sitting, not lying, on the naked sand
Lifted her hands into her wet gold curls
And made two branches from her supple stem of back
Crowned by those golden locks the wind so loved;
Through her lifted arms the unripe breasts were seen,

Starting their sweetness that this sun matured,
And her carved body, that the naked sand
Made firm and hard in every supple curve,
From the clean, lovely roundings of her body's end
Grew to finer shapeliness of straight, sweet legs
Bent, in two arches, for the knee's content;
And now this miracle made double and fulfilled,
Took them into heaven, for the statue stood
Stretching her sleepy limbs to all their length,
As in an anguish or a drawn-out rapture,
Lasting so long that other limbs might take her life,
Which not happening, she came to earth
And stood in all her beauty at the river's brink
In lazy posture with all tension gone,
Her legs, from knee to ankle, and from hip to knee
Made perfect in long symmetry,
So the eyes went up her figure to her golden hair
And knew not where to look most when she left the sand,
To climb with many bendings to a rock above the water
Where she stood, one moment more, in all her nectarine hue
And then, most lovely thing of this slow noon,
Tightening herself into a rod to strike,
Until this poignancy could last no longer,
Leaped out of that ecstasy into the air
And fell like a flying arch upon the water,
Which hid her, for a breath, among its happy shadows.

This was greater beauty than was ever seen
Ruffed and starched in the old finery
Of hoop, and farthingale, and jewelled garter,
Where the pomander like a core of scent
Was held by milky hands to be their heart of sweetness,
If ever stranger, or a crowd, came near;

And the giant and the philosopher forswore that age,
Hiding its fallacies in their new minds
That forgot the casement and the leaded pane;
Old mirrors weedy as a choked mill-pond,
All the dust from dresses; airs tired by the fan,
That waved as a shuttle weaving silken talk
Of plots and jewels, the dagger and the beryl;
Fruits like the bergamot, ices of pure snow,
And all the conceits of the red-walled orchard;
The trees grown for poetry of name and scent
With bitter rinds that no sweet mouths could bite;
All these were forgotten and the lutes were broken;
The unborn madrigals hung late in the green gardens,
Dwelling in the wind because no lips came to find them;
There were no fancies in the ivory flute
And even in the boughs the throats of jewels were dumb;[33]
The laboured beauties of the web and stitch,
All the embroidery of long, thin hands
Crumbled to cobwebs and to dust of wool;
Tapestry of clouds, and of the loaded snows,
Lost their summer and their winter weather
For a long disaster of neglect and sorrow,
When no one read their histories, and not a ghost
Looked for his shadow in those silken shades,
Remembering his kisses by the perfume-blowing trees,
That day when the Knights and the Ladies were away
Hitting the white spheres in a green court of grass
Across the net's entanglement of hope or pain,
Hazarding their chances,
For they took, these two, this peaceful hour of silence,
While sun gilt the very stone and made it gold as corn,
And coming to a fruit-tree, heavy with red lips,
They kissed and kissed again, and blessed the sunset peacefulness.

This was but a pair of ghosts, their day was done,
And quickly, so quickly, they faded from the cherries,
Heaving no sigh from those lips more cold than coral,
That yet were so soft their lovers must be near them
To climb, all in the moonlight, to that coral-isle of cherries
Where they spoke in fountain-voices and the dew lay on their limbs;
They played at bob-cherry in the velvet-night
And none heard their words or saw the branches bowed:
How cruel to those ghosts that were but spirits with no flesh
Who kissed, but had no feeling, who were souls without their bodies,
Who blessed the sunset peacefulness, but had no words to say!

The very world of fantasies, of carved conceits,
Shrivelled in a moment at these miracles of Faunus,
Who showed my pair of heroes the nudity of truth,
In that stripping of the nectarine, the naked girl,
When she stood for their eyes to see and held herself in ecstasy,
Or curved her limbs for more enduring pleasure
Till every bend became a sip of honey,
A biting of the clover-curls in flower-thick grass,
While the flowers were cups of butter, or lion eyes and white-clocked gowns,
A paradise of daisies, little virgins of wide eyes.

It was the spring-time, and the festival of Neptune
Sang in all the brooks and in the showering, short rain,
In every noise of waters, for old ocean was their father;
His snowy soft beard was in the breaking of each wave
As he rolled the shells ashore on the clean, untrodden sands:
And the spring-wind had heard of him and blew more fresh
In this earlier and less-filled world,

This wood where silence had no enemy,
Save for the ring-dove, and the agora of frogs
A-marketing among the ooze and mud.

Here did old Faunus and my heroes live,
They talked till night, and then the frogs croaked on:
And ever, in the day and in the night, there showed
That snow-white temple to Poseidon vowed,
It was a fragile basket for the wind and sea
To heap with their airs like many petals blown,
And now there came the festival and the wine-stained throng,
One sweet-breath morning, as the moon still burned.
This made a double-world, the false and true,
The shadow-earth, the haunted one, or loud redundant firmament:
There were these to choose between, and they both lived,
Dwelling far asunder in an empty sky,
Over other mountains that were white as swans,
While milk-pale oxen climbed slowly to the temple.
The garlands on their horns had, all, a night of dew
For they started at sunset when those flowers were fresh,
And now they drooped and withered, dark-stained, as if with tears,
While men and women, heavy-eyed, hung listless heads, and slept
Trusting the oxen to the marble threshold,
Where a priest with flaming torch laid his hand upon the bridle
And led them through a meadow till the wheels were choked with flowers
And the pilgrims woke in primrose's and cowslip's breath,
Which sweet awakening rubbed soft upon their eyes
So they should open them and feel the God.
This was Poseidon on the windy cliff,
And down in the sea, below, his dolphins played,
Plunging, like thrown daggers, through the lifting waves.

The pilgrims counted them, a sacred number,
To prove the God was in the glaucous air
And then they picked fresh garlands for the mild-eyed oxen:
Their necks with primroses and cowslips twined
Scented their every step, as if all night
They'd slept in meadows where the flowers were wake,
To shed young odours, and sweet snare the wind,
Until it had a world to tell of subtleties
Before the herald trumpet took the night away.

Donne and Gargantua from the wood's steep edge
Saw this pantomime, this play of flowers,
And now a coil of smoke between the marble pillars
Meant sweet incense burning on the altar;
This was a sacrifice, a talisman of death,
For the flowers' dead sisters were offered for the living
To show that the mortal goes but to dust and ashes:
The living dwell in light, and then by fire are done
Till they fill the earthen urn, or on the winds are thrown.
This was all their worship, save a chant of praise,
Since the temple was built for all the waves to know
And the winds must bow their heads upon that cliff;
It had no space in it for more than this,
And only two priests could tend the tripod's flame.
The rest of their worship was a holiday of air,
There were woods of cool shade for when the midday burned
And a fount of pure water in the babbling poplars,
This was all they needed till the evening came;
They slept, and Faunus shaped their dreams for them
Sending a shepherd or a nymph to each
And, since it was Poseidon's feast, sometimes there came
A guest still shining from the sea's green halls,
Who lay in the grass with them, and knew no earth before,

But found this happier than Poseidon's reign,
And left, though it faded when the dream was broken,
A shell that ever whispered to the listening ear
With news of the tritons and their dripping master.

The sun was near the mountains, and their snowy chill
Climbed, at leaf-level, through the poplar-trees
And woke one and another till they all were live,
They fetched the goatskins and the black wine ran,
For the fruits of every orchard and the fawn-skin bread
Needed some slaking of their rough, sharp style,
That drew and made sour the mouth, and pricked and stabbed
the senses.

Two lights, two different worlds, were fired again,
For the moon, from other mountains that were colder, far,
Climbed in her plenitude and lit those snows
And pallor answered pallor from the ends of sky;
Little, loud winds from out of nowhere blew,
As quickly hushed as if a hand had stopped them:
The empty air was draughty: it was neither night nor day,
And only the pillars of the temple kept their colour,
Standing out, pale, against the sky's lit fires,
And gone no darker when moonlight was alone,
For they showed like salt upon a sapphire's light,
Too cold and solemn for the hand to touch.

Then was the dancing-time, the pipes and drums
Proclaimed the thrilling Cordax, with a rolling, rushing flam
In the tempestuous rhythm beaten,
That rattled this prelude, and then, more slow, began.
It was the shepherds' dance upon the wide, sheer hills
Who come down in a battle-charge upon the running goats

To turn the satyr-army to the cactus-grove;
So this was a leaping, galloping, in the rocks and down the grass
To head the scrambling goats and run more fast than them,
And then, from thrill of blood, into a battle-dance
It worked and tore the music:
It was a screaming storm of men, a whirlwind of shrill horns,
Half-blown, no more, for there was hardly breath,
And the drums took the victory in gloom and thunder,
Rattling it like hail upon a hundred leaves,
Till the dance, divided, was more clearly seen,
For they swayed, now, in couples, as an army marching,
But always came round, as if the world was small;
They passed slower, slower, as the music languished,
That now turned to love, and had the pipes to help,
Letting die the drums, as though their work was done;
To such soft warblings the dance sank down,
And the dancers, dead and breathless, to myrtle and acanthus,
Took their spoils of love, or to the cowslip-field,
Where they kissed in that parliament of flowers, or sighed.

Such was their Cordax, and they danced again
At steep foot midnight, with the moon above the temple,
But Faunus and my heroes had gone back into the wood,
They had seen the Poseidonia and the wine-stained dance;
But it was as empty as the banquet in the abbey,
They had no share in it, they were ghosts at empty places,
Yet it came more near to them, it shook their senses
That were sated with madrigals, deep-bosomed lutes,
All the close music of the red-walled orchard
That climbed no higher than the apple-blossom,
In an easy day when every breath was seen,
For the frost still lingered, and blue bonfire-smoke
Made such early songs more precious still,

By crystal clearness, and the jewel on every leaf.
This was very different, there were no helps,
No flowers trained like choristers to keep their youth,
No images, grown and ready formed, were there,
That reached, as they were roses, to the poet's hand;
This was more stern, for on these wind-washed cliffs
There was no refuge but the poplar-wood,
Nothing to hide in, and no tricks to use.

But this was health, where never wind had blown,
And though they were away from it their hearts came near:
They heard the thrilling Cordax and its headlong panic,
Rolling in thunder at that hour of ghosts.
Where are, now, the madrigals, the hunting-horns of Actæon,
In deep orchards sung, or rumbling in the trees,
For once they were beautiful and held the heart,
When the bells of Thelema were like insects in a wood?
Oh, that was a happy summer, long ago
In another world when every wish was young;
But here it comes again, forget that other,
This, this, is the Cordax, hear the poplar-leaves,
This is the Cordax, see the leaping spring,
The lutes, the madrigals, the bells, are dead!

NOTES

1 The machinery of the First Canto is easily understood if it is explained that the voice speaking in the first person is that of the Almighty.

2 For the Second Canto the madrigal by Roberto Greene serves, in some sort, as a text.

The whole of the first paragraph is a description of the clouds riding above the Abbey of Thelema.

3 "Trees drop amber on the banks of Po" is a quotation from another madrigal by Roberto Greene.

4 The stars shall be seen by day.

5 Falling stars, or meteors.

6 This would refer equally well to Dædalus, or to Wilbur Wright. With the latter it is the literal truth.

7 This is still true of every Royal family.

8 Dawn.

9 The Almighty slinks into the chapel where he is worshipped.

10 "Falling sad grain of sea" is the sand—the sand in the hour-glass.

11 A tree fallen into the water is compared to stag-headed Actæon.

12 Tennis.

13 "Lead-locked pools" means leaded window-panes.

14 "The poet's Indian Caucasus" is the paradise set up by Shelley in *Prometheus*.

15 Tennis again, but tennis played with snowballs.

16 "Pale thatch" is the snow on the roofs.

17 "Goose-plumed days" refers to a day heavy with snowflakes.

18 "Feather-litter of the cold" is the snow.

19 The argument of the Fourth Canto is that Gargantua persuades the monks and nuns of Thelema to hold a banquet like the banquet of the Gods as painted by Giulio Romano in the palace at Mantua. The dwarves from Mantua could describe sufficiently what these frescoes were like. In other rooms of the palace at Mantua Giulio Romano painted scenes from the Trojan War, and this accounts for any references to Troy in the Third Canto.

20 This, and the next two lines, are a definite echo of lines 3–5 of p. 32.

21 Mantua was famous for its dwarves. They were specially bred in the palace of the Gonzagas, where their apartments can still be seen. The dwarves painted by Velasquez probably came from Mantua.

22 The suggestion is that the cooks were making sugar-palaces that were tall enough for the dwarves to live in.

23 The Almighty wishes for mortality so that he can experience human emotions.

24 This is the argument of the Fifth Canto.—The banquet held at Thelema produced such unhappiness that the two heroes left the convent and proceeded into the South. In the first line they have passed Vesuvius and are now making for the Temples of Pæstum. They sleep the night there, and the author writes of this from the other side of the Gulf of Salerno, in fact from Amalfi. Thus, on p. 55, l. 21, "saw the ocean whitened with a hundred sails," such fishing-boats will be patrolling the Gulf from Amalfi, and from little ports like Atrani and Vietri. That coast is, indeed, a "coast of cliffs" (l. 22), compared with the malarial plain of Pæstum.

25 Monte Alburno, where the rest of this Canto has its action. It was a mountain particularly admired by Virgil. In his time it was green with holm-oaks.

26 The slopes of Monte Alburno are a notorious earthquake area.

27 My description of Faunus is taken from a famous early Japanese masterpiece, the God of Longevity, painted by the great Sesshiu (1420–1506). This artist passed many years in China, where old-age is venerated, and I think his picture must be much influenced by memories of Chinese hermits and sages whom he had seen.

28 The wells were dried up, and gave no reflection if you looked into them.

29 The stooks of corn make 'pyramids,' or 'tents.'

30 In the Sixth Canto, Faunus and the two heroes set up their retreat still further away. It is near the temple of Sunium in Attica. This is still one of the most beautiful of Greek ruins, and the marble is of unimaginable colour. The temple was vowed to Neptune.

31 The temple of Neptune at Cape Sunium.

32 This, and the following lines, are a reminiscence of Signorelli's Pan and Apollo in the Berlin picture-gallery.

33 Singing-birds.

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